



NELAC Fact Sheet for Laboratories

Q: *What is NELAC?*

A: The National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) is a cooperative association of States and Federal Agencies, formed to establish and promote mutually acceptable performance standards for the operation of environmental laboratories. The standards cover both analytical testing of environmental samples and the laboratory accreditation process. Private sector input to the process is obtained through a variety of mechanisms including open semiannual meetings, participation on NELAC committees, and through the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB), a federally chartered advisory committee with a balanced representation of the private sector, that provides advice to EPA and NELAC. The goal of NELAC is to foster the generation of environmental laboratory data of known and acceptable quality on which to base public health and environmental management decisions.

Q: *What is NELAP?*

A: The National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) is the program that implements the NELAC standards. States and Federal agencies serve as Accrediting Authorities with coordination facilitated by EPA to assure uniformity. Accreditation by one NELAP Accrediting Authority is mutually recognized by the other State and Federal Accrediting Authorities approved under NELAP. NELAP recognized 11 State programs as Accrediting Authorities in the summer of 1999. Additional states have begun preparing, or have already applied, for approval as Accrediting Authorities.

Q: *Which states can participate in NELAC?*

A: Every state is encouraged to participate in the development and adoption of the NELAC laboratory and accreditation program standards whether or not the state intends to seek NELAP recognition as an Accrediting Authority. States may also choose to require laboratories in their state to obtain NELAP accreditation.

Q: *With states as accrediting authorities, how is the program national?*

A: All states and federal agencies which have a NELAP-approved accreditation program must adhere to the standards adopted by NELAC and be inspected by qualified NELAP assessors in order to become a NELAP Accrediting Authority. Such Accrediting Authorities also must agree to recognize other NELAP-approved lab accreditation programs.

Q: *How does the private sector participate in NELAC?*

A: The private sector, e.g., commercial laboratories, industry, and environmental consulting firms as well as local government labs, are encouraged to attend the conferences and contribute information and recommendations in the development of all standards. Although not voting members, the private sector constitutes half the members of all standing and administrative committees. The private sector also provides consensus advice through the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board. Finally, the private sector can participate in any NELAC meeting and provide individual comments at any time.

Q: *What is the basis of NELAC accreditation?*

A: All laboratories must complete and submit an application form, pay any required fees, pass an on-site inspection, demonstrate qualifications of testing personnel and participate in two NELAP-recognized single-blind, single-sample Proficiency Test (PT) studies per year for each field of testing for which it seeks or wants to maintain accreditation. On-site assessments of each laboratory, which include compliance with specified quality assurance requirements, will be conducted at least once every two years.

Q: *Won't NELAC accreditation be a burden on small laboratories?*

A: The NELAC standards are a flexible system, allowing small laboratories to be accredited for specific analytical methods only. The activities required of a small laboratory under NELAC will be comparable to its scope of accreditation.

Q: *Does my laboratory need to be accredited?*

A: NELAC is publishing standards applicable under all EPA programs, with the exception of EPA's Good Laboratory Practices program. Although NELAP is a voluntary program, state and federal agencies may make participation

mandatory for the labs under their jurisdiction.

Q: *How can a laboratory apply for national accreditation?*

A: Private and local government laboratories will need to apply to the NELAP-recognized Accrediting Authority of the state in which their testing facility is located. If that state does not have a NELAP-recognized Accrediting Authority, or its program is of limited scope, a lab may apply for accreditation to another state for those analyses not included in its home state's program. Those State and Federal laboratories which report to an agency that is also an Accrediting Authority will have the option of applying through another Accrediting Authority.

Q: *When does my lab need to be accredited, and for what?*

A: Each laboratory must contact those States within which customer samples originate, to determine its obligations under NELAP. The lab's timeline for accreditation and scope of accreditation depends on the requirements of the individual State programs.

Q: *What will this cost?*

A: This is one aspect of NELAP that is not national in scope. Each State and their Accrediting Authority determine any fees required to defray the cost of their accreditation programs. Additionally, laboratories may be required to purchase the required PT samples.

Q: *How will my lab benefit from NELAC?*

A: Commercial labs will benefit because adherence to NELAC standards will:

- replace redundant and often contradictory inspections with comprehensive standardized inspections;
- Improve acceptability of data to regulators and customers;
- significantly reduce the substantial indirect costs associated with redundant accreditation activities.

Industry/municipal in-house labs will benefit because adherence to NELAC standards will:

- establish or help improve competitiveness and credibility of data; and
- improve acceptability of data to regulatory agencies.

Q: *What do I need to do now?*

A: The answers to this question may best be determined by pointing your Web Browser to: <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/nelac>. At this site, you can find copies of the NELAC Standards, minutes of NELAC committee meetings, names of committee members and State NELAC Representatives, among a wealth of other relevant information. With this resource, you can:

- Familiarize your laboratory with the NELAC standards; get a clear understanding of what they say and what will be expected;
- Determine to which state(s) your laboratory must apply for NELAP accreditation. If your home state is not a NELAP accrediting authority or the scope of accreditation is too limited for your lab, you should seek information about other states' NELAP-recognized programs;
- Start reviewing your laboratory's systems to determine conformance with the new standards; and
- **BECOME INVOLVED IN NELAC!**

Labs without Internet access can also contact their state laboratory accrediting agency, or:

For further information, you may also contact:

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For microfiche or hardcopies of the NELAC standards,
contact:

NTIS

5285 Port Royal Road

Springfield, VA 22161

T: 1-800-553-6847 or 703-605-6000

F: 703-605-6900

TDD: 703-487-4639

E: orders@ntis.fedworld.gov

I: <http://www.ntis.gov/ordernow>